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Risk Everything to Overcome the Fear of Dying

Throughout the novel *White Noise* by Don DeLillo, we are constantly are confronted with death and the characters perceptions of it. Jack and Babette often talk about who they think should die first and they are continually trying to find ways to get their minds off of death. Jack has his Hitler studies to provide help while his wife turns to medication to try to calm her anxieties about death. Death is all around and people can’t stop thinking about it. Even after people survive the airborne toxic event they still have this obsession with what death is. Jack mentions how death could be nothing but sound. This book illustrates how many people are afraid of death and they will almost anything, even if this involves putting their health or lives at risk, just so they can try to overcome the fear of dying.

First of all, Babette is one of the main persons who does what is in her power to try to rid herself of the fear of death. She decides to put her marriage in danger by agreeing to cheat on her husband in exchange for the Dylar pills. Babette even states “I did what I had to do. I was remote. I was operating outside of myself. It was a capitalist transaction” (DeLillo 194). Babette does everything she can to try to make it seem like she had to commit adultery ad like getting rid of her fear of death is more important than her marriage and her husband’s happiness. She tries to justify her actions like she did the right thing and like she shouldn’t be held accountable for her decision. Not only does Babette put her marriage on the line but she also jeopardizes her health. She knows that the pill has a high possibility of not working and plus she is aware of all the negative side effects. She informs Jack “I could die. I could live but my brain could die. The left side of my brain could die but the right side could live… I could walk sideways but not forward. I could not distinguish words from things…” (DeLillo 193). Babette is willing to risk all these things just for a small chance that the pill could make her stop thinking about death.

Jack’s daughter Steffie puts herself through depressing drills where she pretends to be dying. She is putting her emotional health in danger just so it’s smoother in the long run to cope with the idea of death. By playing a victim in such circumstances, she is making it easier to face death so when she is really confronted with it, she won’t be afraid. Heinrich even mentions how “If she does it now, she might not have to do it later. The more you practice something, the less likely it is to actually happen” (DeLillo 207). This shows how Steffie and others around her are doing this so they won’t be worried about death in the future. People are determined to do anything to relieve their anxieties about death.

Heinrich’s friend Orest is willing to risk his life by purposely confronting death. He has his mind set on sitting in a cage full of deadly snakes. Orest wants to do this to be in the *Guinness Book of Records* and by doing this he believes it will prove that he’s above death. He tells Jack “People get bitten. But I won’t” (DeLillo 208). Orest is an example of people who think if they lace themselves in dangerous situations, that they won’t have to live their lives being scared of death. By allowing themselves to overcome the fright of dying, they believe it probably won’t happen to them in a long time.

In conclusion, everybody thinks about death because they are always surrounded by it. Some people will do whatever they can to get rid of this fear of death even if it means putting other things at risk. For example, Babette jeopardizes her marriage and her health just for an opportunity to live life without the thought of death. Steffie and others puts themselves through emotionally draining practices and drills on death just to help ease their concerns about dying. Also, Orest is willing to face death head on and put his life in danger in an attempt to conquer his fears of death. The way people choose to handle this phenomenon differs from person to person. Some people are just so desperate to live without it and they will do whatever they can to erase the thought of death from their memory.